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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 002646

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DEPARTMENT FOR EAP, EAP/MLS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: SENIOR THAKSIN ADVISOR: "HE'S COMING BACK"

REF: A. BANGKOK 2567

[1](#)B. BANGKOK 2502

[1](#)C. BANGKOK 1472

Classified By: Ambassador Ralph L. Boyce. Reason 1.4 (b)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: In a May 3 meeting with the Ambassador, Pansak Vinyaratn -- chief policy advisor to caretaker Prime Minister Thaksin -- said that Thaksin would seek office again if the Constitutional Court nullified the results of the April 2 election. Pansak blamed the "Bangkok elite" for trying to force a royal intervention into the crisis, which the King had deftly avoided. He was dismissive of the opposition Democrat party and portrayed Thaksin as the defender of democracy. Pansak asserted that Thaksin would be able to return and govern effectively despite the opposition's absolute opposition to him because he had "proven his legitimacy" and because Thailand was becoming a "mature democracy." END SUMMARY.

THAKSIN WILL RETURN IF THERE IS AN ELECTION

[1](#)2. (C) On May 3 the Ambassador met with Pansak Vinyaratn, acting Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's principal political advisor. Pansak -- the source of much of Thai Rak Thai (TRT) political strategy -- offered his predictions about Thaksin's political future. Pansak said flatly that if the Constitutional Court annulled the April 2 election (reftel B), then Thaksin would run in the next election. He predicted a decisive win for Thaksin in that scenario. When Thaksin stepped down on April 4, he promised not to return as Prime Minister during the "next parliament," but a new election would free him to come back. According to Pansak, the April 30 comments by acting Deputy Prime Minister DPM Chidchai that Thaksin was preparing for a return to politics were deliberate "feelers" to prepare the public.

[1](#)3. (C) Pansak was confident of a Thaksin victory, pointing to his still considerable base of support among poor and rural voters. "Thaksin has been 'working' the masses for five years. They still support him, if anything they like him more now because they are reacting against the anti-Thaksin elite," said Pansak. According to Pansak, Thaksin believed a new election would confirm his own legitimacy.

WHAT WOULD THE COURT RULING MEAN?

[1](#)4. (C) Pansak said that a new election would occur if the Constitutional Court decides to nullify the April 2 election for "technical problems" associated with the position of the voting booths and the illegal candidacies of third parties. (NOTE: An Administrative Court judge told Polcouns that the April 2 election would likely be nullified on the grounds that there had not been enough time between when Parliament was dissolved and the election to permit opposition parties to organize and campaign. END NOTE) Pansak speculated that the court might rule that TRT had illegally funded small parties in the April 2 election and order that the party be dissolved. In such a scenario, TRT would go along with the court's decision but would continue to function as an entity, under a new name. "We'll just reverse the letters," Pansak quipped.

"DEMOCRATS ARE WEAK AND UNORIGINAL"

[1](#)5. (C) Pansak said a ruling nullifying the April 2 election would serve as a "face saving" measure that would allow the opposition Democrats to participate in the next election. He was dismissive of the Democrat Party's ability to effectively run in a future election, and called Democrat Party leader Aphisit's declaration that he was ready to be Prime Minister "laughable." The Democrats had not offered any new policies and have failed to capitalize on the situation. "Their one unifying goal was to remove Thaksin, they don't offer voters a real alternative."

"OPPOSITION FROM BANGKOK ELITE IS UNDEMOCRATIC"

[1](#)6. (C) As in past conversations (reftel C) Pansak lashed out at the "Bangkok elite" who had lined up against Thaksin,

saying they were "out of touch, unrealistic and not serious about democracy." The old elite cannot accept the new political realities and could never accept Thaksin, who is an outsider. Thaksin's refusal to disappear from political life was incredibly irritating and they were deeply resentful of the fact that he had changed politics in Thailand. "They want to rewrite the constitution to specifically exclude Thaksin from politics. That is not constitutional reform. That is not democracy," he said. Pansak blamed the opposition for trying to force the King into having a political role in the crisis. "Would the U.S. accept a de facto absolute monarchy? That is what they are trying to achieve." The King, however, had correctly avoided involvement and had deftly rejected an intervention in his April 25 speech. The King wanted to avoid involvement, however, a shadowy group close to him was backing the opposition. According to Pansak, Thaksin was well aware that "The palace does not like him."

IF THAKSIN COMES BACK, HOW WILL HE GOVERN?

17. (C) Despite his lack of support in Bangkok, Thaksin is apparently confident he can return to office and govern effectively. According to Pansak, Thaksin believes the last two elections have confirmed his legitimacy and popularity with the Thai people. Pansak said that Thaksin had stepped down on April 4 to demonstrate that he was interested in the democratic process, while the opposition was not. By resigning, Thaksin has cleverly created a situation where the opposition were seen as "destroying democracy," while Thaksin is its champion.

18. (C) Pansak claimed that TRT was not worried about protesters returning to the streets and that Thaksin was prepared to live with a perpetual boycott from the opposition. Pansak believed Thailand could emulate Italy -- a stable country that dealt with continuous political chaos. "Thailand is maturing as a country; we can have protests and still govern." Pansak said Thaksin was willing to return to power immediately, rather than waiting for a year or so, because a break would not alter the elite's absolute oppositions to him, so there was no reason to delay his reentry into Thai politics.

COMMENT

19. (C) Pansak is undeniably close to Thaksin, and so his views need to be taken into account, but in the end the mercurial leader will make his own mind up about returning to the center of the Thai political scene. Pansak's comments, however, clearly indicate that Thaksin is seriously considering a move, and sooner rather than later. That is more than a little bit troubling. We are not so sanguine about the ease of Thaksin's return to Government House. The opposition has recently faded a bit into the background, but would quickly, and confidently, return to the streets in force if Thaksin were to suddenly announce his intention to return to government. But there's still a lot more politics to be played out under any scenario. END COMMENT

BOYCE